I know of only one source for this material that is used at the present time by the 324 354
Copper Eskimo, Port Epworth at the mouth of Tree River in Coronation Gulf, [316]
where the talc chlorite schist occurs as an inclusion in the granite. It is very
coarse in texture, and of a pale grey colour, as can be seen in unused specimens
or by fracturing an old one.

Nevertheless, there seem once to have been other sources. An old woman
who lived at the east end of Coronation Gulf told me that long ago her people
used to make lamps and pots from stone obtained in a quarry on Rae River. An
early explorer, John Rae, did find soapstone at the fall 10 miles from the mouth
of this river,[1] but only in thin beds, which might explain why the Eskimo ceased
to use this source. Then again, I purchased from a Coronation Gulf native a
little toy lamp of typical Copper Eskimo shape (Figure 50), which was certainly [126]
not made from the Port Epworth soapstone, for it is much finer in texture and
of a pale green colour. In the same region I obtained also an unfinished implement,
resembling an imitation lance-head, which was made from a very similar
soapstone, but is yellowish green. Finally, from the west coast of Hudson Bay,
probably from Chesterfield Inlet, the museum has a toy lamp (IV.C.165) that [524]
resembles in colour, texture, and graining the green toy lamp bought in Coronation [126]
Gulf; in shape and dimensions the two are practically identical except that
the Hudson Bay specimen has no shelf. Morley E. Wilson, of the Geological
Survey, Canada, expressed the opinion that these lamps almost certainly came
from the same quarry, because this type of soapstone is exceedingly rare in
Canada, and that the implement like a lance-head was also derived from the
~~same~~ locality. It is worth noting that there are deposits of soapstone near the [135]
mouth of Back River.

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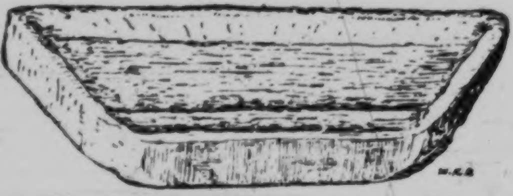

Figure 50. Toy lamp, of pale green soapstone. IV.D.613. 1/1.

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Up to a few years ago natives from Dolphin and Union Strait in the west 221
to Amundsen Gulf in the east often migrated to the Port Epworth quarry in the [316]
spring of the year in order to manufacture their own lamps and pots. Each
family usually made more vessels than it required for its own use in order to [437]
have some for barter when it returned home the following autumn or winter.

Women and children often fashioned the smaller lamps and pots. The 324
larger ones were the work of the men, although once they were finished and 462
handed over to the housewife they became her exclusive property. No special
skill was required; children 10 years of age could make small lamps just as 857
good as those made by their elders. A little more care was necessary in working 354
at a pot, because the rock, though soft, was somewhat brittle, and the walls and [592]
bottom had to be comparatively thin; but even this was not beyond the ability
of a child, as it required patience rather than technical skill. With his crude 324
copper tools a native could quarry out his block and make the largest lamp 316
that was ever used in about 3 days, and the largest pot in no more than a day 412
longer; iron tools, of course, appreciably lessened the time. First, he chiselled 461
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[113]

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[1] Richardson, Sir John: Journal of a Boat Voyage through Rupert's Land, vol. 1, p. 312. London, 1851.

324 clear of the solid rock a block equal to the length of the desired lamp or pot,
316 then gradually hewed it into shape and smoothed it all over by rubbing it with
412 any kind of hard, smooth stone. Formerly the copper-bladed ice chisel served
461 for quarrying the block, and the copper-headed adze for shaping it, but in more
354 recent times the Eskimo have used hatchets, geological hammers, and chisels
with iron blades.

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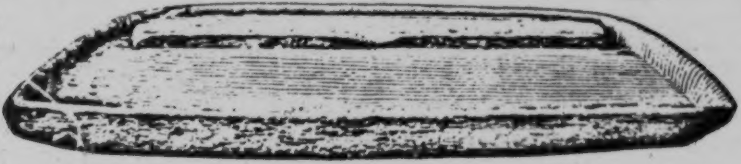

Figure 51. Typical Copper Eskimo lamp. IV.D.657. Approx. 1/8.

The typical Copper Eskimo lamp resembled in shape the lesser segment of a circle in which a large part of the arc was flattened until it was roughly parallel with the sector, whereas the sector itself was very slightly convex. Figure 51 illustrates this general shape. The convexity of the sector was occasionally very marked; and, conversely, the arc was sometimes hardly flattened at all, so that in a few specimens the shape approached an ellipse. The lamp outlined in Figure 52 shows a marked tendency in this direction.

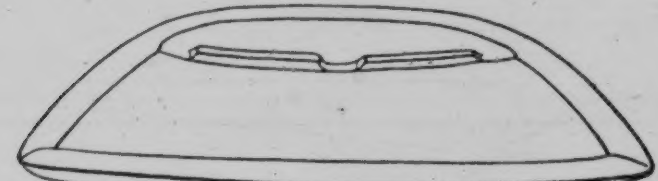

Figure 52. A nearly elliptical lamp. IV.D.651. Approx. 1/8.

The bottom of the lamp was invariably flat. The edges, which were perpendicular, or almost so, on the outside, ranged in thickness from 1½ inches to 3½ inches, and formed a narrow, well-defined rim around the oil well, which comprised the whole body of the lamp hollowed out to a depth of from 1 inch to 1½ inches. The front edge, or lip, sloped down to the well at an angle of around 45 degrees, but elsewhere the edges were practically as perpendicular inside as outside. The well of the lamp was flat like the bottom, not rounded like a saucer. Most lamps were divided into two compartments by a raised ridge parallel to the front and back edges, but very much nearer the back; and the level of the back compartment was nearly always above that of the front, or well proper, thus forming a kind of shelf from which the oil could flow forward through two gaps at the extremities of the dividing ridge, and, in most of the

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[461] secured to the wood by a complicated series of half hitches, well illustrated by Murdoch.[1] As these back lashings slackened with frequent tension and changing weather conditions, the owner wedged little plaques of wood, skin, or bone

[321]

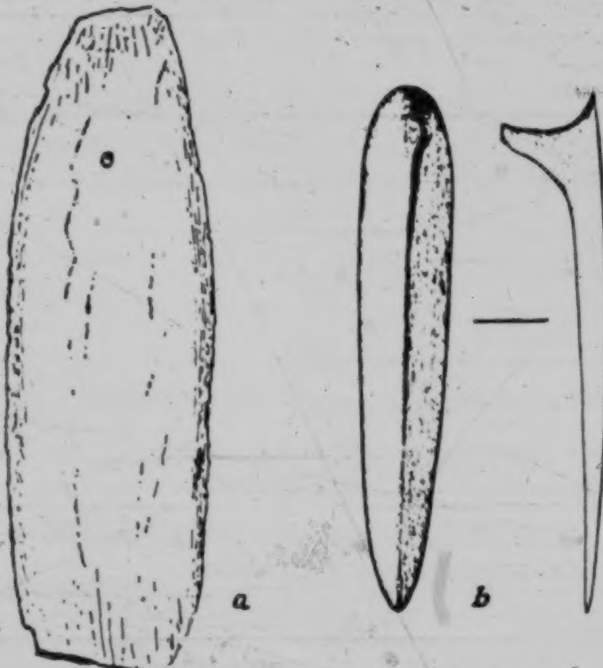

Figure 153. Braces to strengthen the joints of a bow. a: musk-ox horn; b: bone. IV.D.706, 602. 1/1.

beneath them (Figure 154), and when plaques no longer sufficed, he removed the lashings altogether and rewound them, an operation that he could perform in about an hour. Defects in the horns were more serious, but not insuperable. I have seen a native strip a bow down to the bare wood, fit it with two new horns, and relash the weapon ready for use in the space of 4 hours. [461]

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[175]

Figure 154. Plaque of rawhide, wedged under the back lashings of the bow. IV.D.79. 1/1.

The bowstring was made from five or six strands of sinew, twisted together. When stringing his weapon, the hunter sat on the ground and pushed the middle of the bow from him with his foot while pulling the horn towards him.

When the party of Indians with whom Hearne travelled in 1771 massacred some Copper Eskimo at Bloody Fall, near the mouth of Coppermine River, Hearne noticed that most of the Eskimo arrow heads bore triangular points of a slate-like stone, whereas the remainder had points of copper.[2] The Copper Eskimo we encountered were using only points of antler, bone, copper, or iron.

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[1] Murdoch, John: A Study of Eskimo Bows in the U.S. National Museum: Report of the U.S. Nat. Mus., 1884, figs. 8-14.

[2] Hearne: op. cit., p. 100.